Nikki Bauerly ’00

Nikki Bauerly ’00 has seen more than her share of frostbitten feet.

After four years in medical school at Des Moines University and three years in surgical training, Nikki is just finishing her chief residency at Hennepin County Medical Center.

Because HCMC is the third largest nonprofit hospital in the country and serves the largest percentage of uninsured patients in Minnesota, Nikki has worked extensively with people who are vulnerable or homeless.

It is difficult to function fully when one has even a minor foot problem. Because many of Nikki’s patients live on the streets and are on their feet constantly, they present with symptoms of frostbite and ulcers. Many wear ill-fitting shoes, or have no shoes and socks at all; they may have numbness from diabetes or alcoholism, predisposing them to wounds with infections. Because of their living conditions, many of these patients require foot amputation, which is frustrating to Nikki as she knows that this could be prevented.

In a conversation with her mother, Sharon Bauerly, they came up with a solution to a simple problem. Sharon started to shop for socks and send them in bulk for Nikki to distribute to her patients. Sharon also engaged the help of the students of Sacred Heart School in Sauk Rapids, Minn., where she started the Sock It To Me project.

As Sacred Heart Principal Erin Dirkes Hattlestad ’93 said, “We accepted the opportunity to ‘Do onto others as you would have them do onto you.’” Children of all ages brought socks to school for their Advent project. The socks were distributed through Catholic Charities in St. Cloud and HCMC in Minneapolis.

Nikki wrote to the students and their families, “There are many reasons our patients are homeless, but one thing is the same. They all have cold feet. … Christ’s message of love is a verb and not a noun. Your message goes out to people you will never meet.”

Nikki doesn’t consider her efforts exceptional, because she grew up watching her mother and father contribute their talents and energy to numerous projects. Also, although she may be the first alumna to become a podiatric surgeon, she says her ability to connect her values and talents to the needs of others is like many other CSB graduates.

As a natural science major with minors in sports medicine and psychology, and as a CSB varsity athlete for four years, Nikki can name several influences in addition to her parents.

She learned hard work and discipline, and that her goals were worth going after from athletic director and former volleyball coach Carol Howe-Veenstra.

Athletic trainer and advisor Julie Deyak was the first to suggest she explore podiatric surgery as a career option.
S. Lois Wedl showed her compassion and caring for others.

Immunology professor Dr. Carol Ness, who is also a physician, showed her that medicine is fascinating as well as practical and helped her get into Des Moines University.

After 1,600 surgical procedures in the past three years, Nikki is professionally ready to seek board qualification and find employment in her field. Coincidentally, hundreds of homeless patients had warm feet this winter and the children at Sacred Heart School learned that their help could make a difference.